

VĀLMĪKI'S RĀMA, A NEW PERSPECTIVE
FROM THE VIEWPOINT OF HIS ENEMIES

This paper is an attempt to study Vālmiki's portraiture of his hero from a thoroughly new angle, which has hitherto not been attempted, but which has a special value in the true assessment of the dimensions of his greatness.

The numerous passages in the epic ¹ throwing direct or indirect light on the personality of Rāma will have to be compiled meticulously, viewed comparatively and assessed collectively with a critical eye to arrive at the integral picture of his personality as it emerges from the whole epic. Such passages in the epic may be put down as falling under these five categories:

(i) Vālmiki's own reflections about Rāma's actions and utterances

1. The Madras Law Journal Press Edition (1933) of the epic has been used for citing references. This edition was based on four Mss. all drawn from the then Madras Presidency and also recorded variants from five printed editions including the one by Gaspare Gorresio, published from Parigi (1843) and an old edition in Grantha script. Besides, readings adopted by the three reputed commentaries *Tilaka*, *Bhūṣaṇa* (*Govindarājīya*) and *Śirmaṇi* have also been recorded. The authenticity of the text presented in this edition (entitled *Śrīmad-Vālmiki-Rāmāyaṇam*) is vouchsafed by the authority of the four eminent scholars (modern and traditional) who constituted the editorial panel: Mahāmahopādhyāya S. Kuppuswami Sastrigal, Mahāmahopādhyāya Krishna Sastrigal, S.K. Padmanatha Sastrigal and T.V. Ramachandra Diksitar. It contains also illuminating exegetical notes by the last named scholar.

The following abbreviations have been used in citing references: BK=*Bālakāṇḍa*; AYK=*Ayodhyakāṇḍa*; ARK=*Aranyakāṇḍa*; YK=*Yuddhakāṇḍa*.

in the different situations, in the course of his narrations or descriptions of the incidents and episodes in the epic. This will include also his poetic response in the form of the imagery conceived by him which expresses his sympathies for and fine sensibilities towards Rāma;

- (ii) Rāma's own utterances about himself, either affirming his talents, asserting his mettle and proclaiming his potentials when faced with challenging situations, or confessing his deficiencies, admitting his faults and conceding his failures at moments of despondency or frustration;
- (iii) the remarks of all such persons well disposed to Rāma about his response to a given situation, reflecting their opinions about him. This category will include his close relatives like Sītā, Lakṣmaṇa, Kausalyā, Daśaratha, Bharata etc.; others closely associated with him in different capacities like Sumantra, Vasiṣṭha, the second-line queens of Daśaratha, the employees in the palace, the rank and file of Ayodhyā etc.; his friends and admirers like Guha, Sugrīva, Hanumān etc.; his committed supporters and beneficiaries like the sages of Daṇḍakāraṇya and, lastly even the gods who are cogs in the wheel of the divine scheme, of which Rāma is a part, without his being conscious of it;
- (iv) the remarks of all such persons, ill-disposed to Rāma for different reasons of their own, seeking to interpret Rāma's utterances and actions in the complex situations of the epic, in the light of their own prejudices. This category will include his enemies, opponents and rivals – Rāvaṇa, Kumbhakarṇa, Vibhīṣaṇa, Akampana, Śūrpaṇakhā among *rākṣasas*, Vālin and Tārā among the monkeys and Mantharā, Kaikeyī and the sage Jābālī among humans. The present paper is concerned exclusively with the responses of this category of persons to the conduct and behaviour of Rāma in the context of the many vicissitudes of his life, as described by Vālmīki;
- (v) the response of such persons, if any, who are neutral and belong neither to the side of Rāma's friends nor to the camp of his foes.

The importance of this approach

The special importance of this approach lies in this. The compliments paid to Rāma by his circle of relatives, associates, friends or admirers are liable to be looked upon as partisan or as extravagant expressions of their love for Rāma. After all, love exaggerates and excessive love exaggerates excessively. Hence any tributes to Rāma's greatness by persons with natural leanings towards him are apt to be branded as onesided. Critical spirit may insist that they should be taken with a grain of salt! The personal factor, therefore, considerably reduces the importance of such subjective tributes.

As for Rāma's own declarations about himself – of which there are some high-flown instances in the epic – they may as well be dismissed as egotistic claims, unless it could be established that Rāma was never given to vain boasting. Though there is an unequivocal declaration by Sītā² that Rāma never uttered a false word nor would he ever do so in future, this too may not satisfy hypercritical sceptics.

Even Vālmiki's tributes to Rāma – which are sometimes quite lavish – are likely to be viewed as coloured and exaggerated, coming as they do from a committed admirer. But the *Rāmāyaṇa* claims that Brahmā blessed Vālmiki with a mystic vision by which he could see all that transpired between Rāma and Sītā and, for that matter, among all his characters, including their highly secret private dealings, dialogues and even hidden feelings. After having endowed Vālmiki with such a unique boon, Brahmā further declares: «No word of yours in this epic will turn out to be untrue.» (*na te vāg-anṛtā kāvyē kācidatra bhaviṣyati*)³. But again, Vālmiki was a poet first and a poet last. And poetry would cease to be poetry if it were to be just a bland enumeration of facts or events. The soul of poetry lies in its fine excess. Sanskrit literary critics also recognised that Vakrokti is the essential stuff of poetry.

On the contrary, the tributes paid to Rāma by his rivals, oppo-

2. *mithyā-vākyāṇāṃ na te bhūtaṇāṃ na bhaviṣyati rāghava* / (ARK 9,4)

3. BK 2,35.

nents and adversaries can safely be put down as least coloured by subjective factors and, therefore, the most trustworthy. Eulogies by enemies can, therefore, be safely accepted as authentic. The reason is pure and simple. No adversary would ever praise a person unless the praise is fully warranted. Hence, the fact that the praise comes from the mouth of a person's adversary can be a sort of fool-proof evidence to conclude that he fully deserves it. If at all any marginal allowance has to be made for enemies' statements, it will be on the positive side of extra credibility, for enemies are only likely to suppress or under-rate what is good and overplay what is bad. It will only be proper, therefore, to take complimentary references by enemies not merely at par, but at a little premium.

According to normal behavioural patterns, a person inimically disposed either passes over the good and praiseworthy aspects of his adversary or deliberately twists them or misinterprets them to present them in a bad light. A fine instance of this from *Rāmāyaṇa* is the way Rāvaṇa speaks of Rāma's exile from Ayodhyā to Mārīca as banishment by his angry father and also heaps a good number of abusive epithets on that paragon of virtue. It is impossible to miss the delightful handling of irony by Vālmīki here, when he makes his Rāvaṇa describe Rāma as a bad character with evil habits; a harsh, cruel, greedy, sensual and sadistic person who had cast *dharma* to the winds!

*pitṛā nīrastāḥ kruddhena sabhāryaḥ kṣaṇajīvitaḥ /
duḥśīlāḥ karkaśas-tīkṣṇo mūrkhō lubdho'jitendriyaḥ //
tyakta-dharmo hyadharmātmā bhūtanām-ahite rataḥ /*⁴

Even the proverbial English phrase about the dialogue between the pot and the kettle would appear to need an amendment to picture the piquancy of this situation of the vicious Rāvaṇa branding the resplendent Rāma vicious. Here, it is not a simple case of the "pot calling the kettle black" but an even more poignant case of the pot calling the glowing fire-brand black! To return to my point, it will, therefore, be perfectly rational to conclude that if an enemy talks well of

a person, that could be a very reliable proof of his goodness or greatness. In other words, the compliments or tributes paid to a person by his enemies can serve as an infallible barometer of his greatness.

In this paper, I propose to consider Vālmiki's portrayal of Rāma from this new perspective. The fact that Rāma in the *Rāmāyaṇa* has a very wide range of enemies drawn from different classes and strata can make such a study really interesting and edifying. Though this large spectrum of Rāma's enemies is an added advantage for the study as such, it has this disadvantage about it, that it makes the canvas too large for the compass of a paper. I shall, therefore, have to make it highly selective and content myself with indicating the broad directions. Keeping in view the constraints of space, I shall discuss here only the case of Mārīca and Rāvaṇa-Mandodarī in detail and briefly touch upon or just mention the other adversaries of Rāma who are relevant to this approach and whose utterances throw interesting light on the personality of Rāma.

Before I proceed to apply this criterion to Vālmiki's Rāma, I shall refer to two references; one from Kālidāsa and one from Vālmiki, which have a bearing on this new perspective conceived by me:

- (1) I was highly gratified to find that the basic principle enunciated by me regarding judging a person from the response of enemies has been recognised in essence by earlier writers too. Kālidāsa, for instance, wrote thus of Atithi, grand-son of Rāma, in his *Raghuvamśa*:

indor-agatayaḥ padme sūryasya kumude-'mśavaḥ /
*guṇās-tasya vipakṣe-'pi guṇino lebhire-'ntaram //*⁵

To underline the greatness of Atithi as a man, the poet says that his virtues were recognised even by his opponents. The poet gives two counter-illustrations from Nature to drive his point home. The moon's rays, however soothing by general standards, have little or no impact on her adversary, the lotus. Likewise, the

5. *Raghuvamśa* 17,75.

sun's rays, powerful as they may be, are powerless with the lilies. Kālidāsa means to say that even according to Nature's laws, a thing exerts its influence only on things favourably disposed. But the impact of the personality of a truly great person is universal and cuts across such divisions as friends and foes.

- (2) It was equally interesting for me to discover that there is an oblique hint in the *Rāmāyaṇa* itself of the importance of the response of one's enemies in judging his greatness or otherwise. It is a fine coincidence that this hint appears in the context of Rāma himself. Taking sides with Kausalyā, Lakṣmaṇa makes highly disparaging remarks about Daśaratha's unwitty and unjust decision to revoke the coronation of Rāma and to exile him from Ayodhyā. Recounting the love that all the people, including even his enemies, bore to Rāma, he says:

*devakālpam-rjūṃ dāntam ripūṇamapi vatsalam*⁶

Lakṣmaṇa's statement here that Rāma was beloved of his enemies too, is a clear pointer of Vālmīki's emphasis on enemies' response in judging the personality of a great man.

This idea of Rāma as one beloved of even his enemies is repeated by Vālmīki, later in the *Yuddhakāṇḍa* too. In the exhortation by Garuḍa after resuscitating the two brothers, fallen unconscious by the lethal attack by Indrajit's *nāgapāśa*, Vālmīki makes his Garuḍa address Rāma with the very same words:

*sakhe rāghava dharmajñā ripūṇām api vatsala*⁷

Mārīca

I take up Mārīca first for two reasons. First, his is a case of total conversion from enmity to adoration. Secondly, unlike Vibhīṣaṇa who is the second instance in *Rāmāyaṇa* of such total conversion, he conti-

6. AYK 21,6.

7. YK 50,56.

nues in the enemy's camp even after the complete metamorphosis of his character. His is thus the typical case of an adversary of Rāma, who concedes his greatness and holds him in deep respect, even as an enemy. In the last phase of his life, Mārīca's attitude towards Rāma evolves into one of veneration, bordering on adoration. Vālmiki thus pictures Mārīca as an inveterate enemy, turned overt admirer. He is a fine example of the miraculous conversion wrought by the overawing power of the personality of Rāma. It is highly significant that Mārīca is one of those rare characters in the epic who, according to the traditional exponents of the *Rāmāyaṇa*, realised and adored the divinity of Rāma and, on that account, were blessed with *mokṣa*.

A brief retrospect of the antecedents of Mārīca is necessary to appreciate this radical change that came upon him. Mārīca started his relationship with Rāma as a determined opponent throwing an open challenge and ended up as a mute admirer and secret devotee.

Suketu was a great *yakṣa*, who had no issues. He practised long penance and propitiated Brahmā. Pleased with his penance, Brahmā conferred him the boon of a daughter endowed with the strength of a thousand elephants but declined his request for a son. The daughter Tātakā married Sunda and begot Mārīca by him. When Sunda died as a result of Agastya's curse, mother and son attacked him jointly. Agastya cursed Mārīca to be a *rākṣasa* and divested Tātakā of her winsome countenance and cursed her to become a cannibal with a horrible form and an ugly face⁸.

Mārīca has his first encounter with Rāma in the sacrifice performed by Viśvāmitra. The full description of this and the experience he had of the power of Rāma's arrows is given by Vālmiki in Mārīca's own words later in *Aranyakāṇḍa*, when he describes the unforgettable experience of that encounter in detail to Rāvaṇa and warns him that if he makes the mistake of antagonising Rāma, he will pay for it with his life and the annihilation of Laṅkā⁹. Mārīca also recounts his latest bid to attack Rāma when he came to the Daṇḍakā forest with Sītā and Lakṣmaṇa. With two other *rākṣasas* as accomplices, Mārīca assumed

8. BK 25,12-13.

9. ARK 37,4-6; 38,24-25 and 38,28-29.

the form of a wild carnivorous animal of massive size and wrought havoc among the hermits eating their flesh and sucking their blood in a sort of mad spree. When he set eyes on this Ayodhyā-trio, he remembered Rāma's previous animosity and charged at Rāma along with his two accomplices, thinking that he was now a hermit and would not strike. But his expectations were belied. Rāma shot three deadly arrows at the charging animals. However, since Mārīca had an earlier taste of Rāma's arrows, he parried the shot taking a big leap. He managed to escape by the skin of his teeth but the other two paid for the misadventure with their lives¹⁰.

The rest of the story is better narrated in Mārīca's own words and style. Says he: «This second experience of Rāma's arrow was enough for me for a full life-time. Having somehow survived it, I fled that place for life. I dare not think ever again of meddling with sages or their sacrifices. I have settled down here as a recluse in this lonely forest. But a morbid fear of Rāma still haunts me here, so much so, that I have become a victim of strange hallucinations. Night and day I see only Rāma all around. Whichever way I turn, I see in every tree the same Rāma clad in tree-dark and deer-skin, wielding his fierce bow and standing before me like Yāma with his lethal noose in hand.

I am now so terrified of Rāma that I see thousands of Rāmas all around. It looks as though the whole forest itself has become Rāma. In solitude, I see only Rāma. I see only Rāma in my dreams too and wake up to collapse into a swoon. This Rāma-phobia has so struck me down that even the mention of words beginning with “r” like “ratna” and “ratha” frightens me. For goodness sake, do not take his name before me, if you wish to see me alive».

Here are some of the relevant verses from the tract in Vālmīki's ringing words:

*vṛkṣe vṛkṣe ca paśyāmi cīra-kṛṣṇājīnāmbaram /
grhīta-dhanuṣam rāmam pāśahastam-ivāntakam //*
*api rāma-sahasrāṇi bhūtaḥ paśyāmi rāvaṇa /
rāmaabhūtam-idam sarvam-aranyam pratibhāti me //*
*rāmam-eva hi paśyāmi rahite rākṣasādhipa /
dṛṣṭvā svapnagatam rāmam-udbhramāmi vicetanaḥ //*

10. ARK 49,2-3 and 49,8-13.

*rakarādīni nāmāni rāma-trastasya rāvaṇa /
ratnāni ca rathāś-caiva vitrāsam janayanti me //*¹¹

We have here a picture of Mārīca's fear from Vālmiki's brush which speaks volumes for Rāma's greatness as a warrior. In the language of Sanskrit literary criticism, we have here a brilliant case of *vīrarasa-dhvani* through *bhayānaka-rasa*.

Further on, Mārīca warns Rāvaṇa that through his sins he will be ushering in his own end and total devastation of the whole *rākṣasa*-world and urges him not to sow a wind and reap a whirl wind. He flatly refuses to do Rāvaṇa's bidding, whatever he may decide, war or peace.

Mārīca's tributes to Rāma are not confined only to his heroism in battle. He praises Rāma's eminence as an upholder of *dharma* also in equally eloquent terms. Reference was already made to the highly derogatory terms by which Rāvaṇa spoke of Rāma's character to Mārīca. Mārīca then contradicts all the misstatements made by Rāvaṇa, chides him for believing in canards and spreading them and finally proclaims his unbounded respect for him as an exemplar of *dharma* through this oft-quoted line :

*rāmo vigrahavān dharmas-sādhus-satyaparākramaḥ /
rājā sarvasya lokasya devānām maghavāniva //*¹²

The noble Rāma he says, is a veritable embodiment of *dharma* and is a crusader for the cause of Truth. This tribute to Rāma's rectitude and integrity coming from a sworn enemy from the *rākṣasa*-camp is considerably more significant than any similar tributes from his numerous admirers. If an enemy like Mārīca was constrained to declare this in such eloquent terms before Rāma's own arch-enemy, one can easily gauge the mighty impact of Rāma's adherence to *dharma* on society at large. And it is precisely to heighten the effect of such a statement that Vālmiki has chosen to make this momentous declaration through one of his adversaries to the greatest of his adver-

11. ARK 39,14-18.

12. ARK 37,13.

saries. We have here a beautiful example of the subtle ways of Vālmīki's literary art.

There is yet another aspect of Mārīca's attitude to Rāma which deserves more detailed notice. I had made a passing reference to the *Rāmāyaṇa*-tradition in India that holds up Mārīca as one who realised the manifestation of the godhead in Rāma. Here again Vālmīki's art has followed the literary manner of artful concealment, which consists in exposing while seeking to conceal and concealing while seeking to expose, which goes by the name of *dhvani* in the parlance of Sanskrit aesthetics. The powerful description of Mārīca's terror-stricken state with his mind totally absorbed in Rāma through days and nights is a fine poetic projection of the yogic state of *savikalpa-samādhi* of the *yogins*. The basic difference between the psychological state of the normal *yogin* and the similar state of Mārīca here is that in the normal case, love serves as the motive force; whereas Mārīca's is a case of abnormal psychology with fear providing the motive force. Indian philosophers have affirmed that as long as the ultimate objective of *sākṣātkāra* or total mental absorption is achieved, it is immaterial what serves as the means. The *Bhāgavatapurāṇa* speaks of six such media for achieving total mental oneness with God – love, hatred, fear, association, friendship and devotion – and illustrates the six states with the *gopis*, Śiśupāla, Kaṁsa, Yādavas, Pāṇḍavas and sages like Nārada. The *Purāṇa* also affirms that in practical life strong hatred is an even more effective means for total mental absorption than other means like devotion. The following are the relevant verses from the *Bhāgavatapurāṇa*:

kāmād dveṣād bhayāt snehād yathā bhaktyeśvare manah /
āvesya tadagham hitvā bahavas-tad-gatim gatāḥ //
gopyaḥ kāmād bhayāt kaṁso dveṣāccaidyādayo nṛpāḥ /
*sambandhād vṛṣṇayaḥ snehād yūyaṁ bhaktyā vayaṁ vibho //*¹³

13. Śrīmad-Bhāgavata 7,1,29-30.

This idea is repeated again in the tenth *Skandha* in the following verse (10,29,15):

kāmaṁ krodhaṁ bhayaṁ snehaṁ-aikyaṁ sauhṛdam-eva vā /
nityaṁ harau vidadhato yānti tanmayatām hi te //

*yathā vairānubandhena martyas-tanmayatām-iyāt /
na tathā bhakti-yogena iti me niścītā matiḥ //*¹⁴

The case of Mārīca in *Rāmāyaṇa* has an edifying parallel in the case of Kaṁsa in *Bhāgavata*. The *Purāṇa* too describes Kaṁsa's morbid fear of Kṛṣṇa saying that he saw the whole world as Kṛṣṇa because he was thinking only of Kṛṣṇa, whether he was sitting, standing, lying, eating or going about in the country.

*āsīnas-samviśams-tiṣṭhan bhuñjānaḥ paryaṭan mahīm /
cintayāno hr̥ṣīkeśam-apaśyat-tanmayam jagat //*¹⁵

The parallelism between Mārīca and Kaṁsa, according to this recorded tradition is complete. Both reached final communion with their respective Godheads through fear. The commentary of Govindarāja on the *Rāmāyaṇa* on the verse «*vṛkṣe vṛkṣe ca paśyāmi...*» quoted earlier clearly shows that he was thinking of this parallelism when he wrote :

«*vṛkṣe vṛkṣa iti*». «*hṛdayān-nāpayātosi dikṣu sarvāsu dṛśyase*»
«*rāma-bhūtam jagad-abhūd-rāme rājyam praśasati*» *ityādāviva*
śokarāga-bhayādi-janita-nirantara-santanyamāna-cintā-saktasya
sākṣātkāropapattiḥ-bhayasyottarottara-bhūmikābhiprāyeṇa darśana-
*syāpyuttarottara-daśetyanusandheyam*¹⁶.

Through this picture of fear, Vālmīki has beautifully suggested that Mārīca had reached the elevated state of mind, by which one attains oneness with God. Mārīca in the *Rāmāyaṇa* is thus an excellent illustration of a hardened enemy of Rāma getting converted and also elevated, thereby providing one of the best possible tributes to Rāma's greatness.

14. *ibid.* 7,1,26.

15. *ibid.* 10,2,24.

16. *Rāmāyaṇa* of Vālmīki with the commentaries *Tilaka* of Rāma, *Rāmāyaṇa-śiromaṇi* of Śivasahāya and *Bhūṣaṇa* of Govindarāja. Ed. by Shastri Shrinivasa Katti Mudhola-kara. Gujarati Printing Press Edition (Bombay, 1919), reprinted by Parimal Publications, Delhi, 1990; vol. III *Aranyakāṇḍa*; 39,15 (page 1205).

Rāvaṇa and his wife Mandodarī

Rāvaṇa, on the other hand, is quite different from Mārīca. Pride and arrogance were the ruling traits of his personality. Consequently, fear was aline to his nature. There was, therefore, no question of his transformation through fear, as with Mārīca. This explains why he spurned Mārīca's grave warnings not to interfere or clash with Rāma and also pooh-poohed the advice and suggestions of many senior well-meaning relatives and associates like his maternal grandfather Mālyavān, his brothers Kumbhakarṇa and Vibhīṣaṇa, his wife Mandodarī and her father and his commander-in-chief Prahasta not to antagonise Rāma and quietly return Sītā to him. Rāvaṇa's feelings and thoughts about Rāma and his reactions to Rāma's actions had to be in tune with this basic background of his character. It is but, proper, therefore, that Vālmīki portrayed the changes in Rāvaṇa's attitude and behaviour towards Rāma, not as an abrupt affair as in the case of Mārīca; but as a very slow and gradual transformation from uncompromising animosity, hatred and contempt to the final half-hearted and reluctant admission of his greatness as a warrior under compelling circumstances and the changing vicissitudes and reverses in the war, through different phases of fear. From initial apathy and indifference, his attitude changes first to concern and care, then to doubt and diffidence and to apprehension and worry at the next stage and finally to strong sub-conscious fear – this summarises the slow decline of Rāvaṇa's mental state and what all he thought or said of Rāma during these periods reflect these changing moods. We must bear this in mind while trying to analyse or assess Rāvaṇa's views or opinions of Rāma. But one thing is beyond doubt. Fear or no fear, inward or outward, Vālmīki's Rāvaṇa does not bend to the last, nor flee from Rāma, as Mārīca did. He is made of sterner stuff. He himself declares it clearly to Mālyavān: «I may break into two but I will not bend before any one. This is my inborn weakness.»

*dvidhā bhajyeyam-apyevam na nameyam kadācana /
eṣa me sahaḥ doṣaḥ svabhāvo duratikramaḥ //*¹⁷

17. YK 36,11.

With this comparative and critical assessment before us, I now take up the detailed consideration of what Rāvaṇa, the arch-enemy of Rāma, thought and said about him. I shall also briefly refer, in passing, to his wife Mandodarī's sentiments and thoughts about Rāma.

Though Rāvaṇa was the foremost among the adversaries of Rāma and, on that account, should have been considered first in this study, I did not do so and that, for an important reason.

Rāvaṇa, as portrayed by Vālmiki, was made of a totally different mettle. Rāvaṇa's enmity towards Rāma was so deep-rooted, his prejudice against Rāma so hardened, his ingrained temperament so egocentric and puffed up with self-esteem and his *rākṣasa*-blood so thoroughly contaminated that it would be next to impossible to expect him to recognise anything good or great in anyone else except in himself or in his *rākṣasa*-ilk. Least of all, would he admit any streak of goodness in a sworn adversary like Rāma. When his jaundiced eyes would not see spotless white as white, it was but inevitable that even the immaculate white in Rāma should look stark black in his jet black vision! Having portrayed Rāvaṇa in such colours, it was but proper that Vālmiki's muse did not conceive of a situation – as he did with Mārīca, Akampana and their likes – where Rāvaṇa would confess to Rāma's heroism in battle, as even some of the tallest warriors in the *rākṣasa*-camp did. Had Vālmiki made his Rāvaṇa stoop so easily and speak of Rāma in strains similar to those of Mārīca or others that would have struck a discordant note in the symphony of Rāvaṇa's integral personality, as painted by Vālmiki's brush. The superb artist that he was, Vālmiki could not commit such a fundamentally inartistic error. That is why Vālmiki makes his Rāvaṇa continue to be stubborn against the worst odds and reverses in battle and persists in his brava-do and foolhardy decisions. It is only on rare occasions when some of his mightiest chiefs face defeat and death or when he is apparently at the end of the tether that Rāvaṇa secretly smells the superiority of Rāma, rues the hopeless situation of his own making and begins to fear that it was all the visitation of the numerous curses he had invited upon himself from Umā, Nandī and Anaraṇya (an early predecessor of Rāma in the solar lineage) downwards to Nalakūbara son of Kubera, who cursed him for his rape of Rambhā and the female ascetic Vedavatī who had acquired great spiritual powers by long penance

and whom he raped by force. The memory of all these curses sits on his soul like a nightmare soon after he is humiliated by Rāma in his first open battle with him, when, denuded of all his arms and his crown ripped off, he stands helpless before Rāma and his life is spared by the generous Rāma, who invites him to come again refreshed, fully armed and equipped to taste his strength again. Later on, when the mighty Kumbhakarna is gone followed by Prahasta the commander-in-chief of the *rākṣasa* army and his two brothers and four sons also perish one after another, including Atikāya, the greatest of them all, the truth about Rāma dawns upon Rāvaṇa and he openly admits and admires Rāma's superior valour. He now says in so many words – for the first and last time – that Rāma was great in strength and his expertise in miraculous missiles (*astra*) was also great, so much so, that all the mighty *rākṣasa* heroes met with their disastrous end at his hands. He also gives vent to his subconscious suspicion (which he must have been nursing in his mind all along) that Rāma was perhaps Lord Nārāyaṇa himself come down on earth, to punish him for his wrongs.

aho nu balavān rāmo mahad astrabalam ca vai //
yasya vikramam āsādyā rākṣasā nidhanam gatāḥ /
*tam manye rāghavam vīram nārāyaṇam-anāmayaṃ //*¹⁸

As if to make amends for this unbending egotism of Rāvaṇa, Vālmiki has portrayed his wife Mandodarī as a study in contrast. In fact, Mandodarī serves as a fine foil to Rāvaṇa in this regard, though it is true that she surfaces very rarely in the epic. There are just a few peep-holes in the epic, which indicate that Mandodarī, albeit bold and daring as befitting the life-long partner of a towering hero, keeps on cautioning him frequently about the greatness of Rāma, warning him that he will have to pay dearly for his trespasses on Rāma's preserves and keeps on prodding him to desist from such encroachments, in the interest of his own personal safety and the safety of the *rākṣasa* world. It is interesting to recall here some of the statements of

18. YK 72,10-11.

Mandodarī about Rāma's superhuman feats as a warrior and, what is more, her own intuitive conclusions about Rāma's divinity. Incidentally, Mandodarī is another among the conspicuous characters in the wide canvas of Vālmīki, recognised in the Indian tradition of *Rāmāyaṇa* as conscious of the truth of Lord Viṣṇu's incarnation as Rāma. Her long lament in the battlefield over the fallen Rāvaṇa contains some clinching evidence for this. Wailing over the corpse of Rāvaṇa in the battlefield, Mandodarī gives vent to her own earlier intuitive feelings about the greatness and divinity of Rāma. I give below a running translation of a few of the relevant verses from that long lament:

«I knew full well that he was not an ordinary human being, right when he killed your brother Khara in Janasthāna single-handed, though protected by hosts of *rākṣasas*. Right when the monkeys accomplished the unbelievable feat of building a bridge on the great ocean, I sensed with my sixth sense that Rāma was not a mere man. Verily, he is the highest of *yogins*, the eternal supreme Soul, the one without birth, life and death, the greatest of the great, the supreme God beyond darkness, the eternal, unchanging, invincible one (Nārāyaṇa) of perennial glory, who bears his characteristic insignia the conch (*śaṅkha*), the discus (*cakrā*) and the mace (*gadā*) in his hands and the famous *Śrivatsa*-gem on his chest. For sure, it is the self same supreme Lord of the whole Universe, the upholder of Truth, God Viṣṇu of infinite splendour who has slain you for the general weal of the world, assuming human form and surrounded by his whole retinue of gods, in the guise of myriads of monkeys»¹⁹.

Rāvaṇa's chief queen Mandodarī is thus another important person from the enemy's camp to speak so highly of Rāma. The choice of Mandodarī for such an extravagant eulogy of Rāma's heroism and open declaration of his greatness and divinity by Vālmīki is particularly significant. With the characteristic subtlety of his art, Vālmīki thereby suggests that even years of association with and indoctrination by Rāvaṇa could not shake Mandodarī's convictions about the many glories of Rāma's personality.

19. YK 114,14-17.

To return to Rāvaṇa: he looks upon Rāma with a sort of patronising disdain and cold indifference. He was a mere man and all men were weaklings before the fiery *rākṣasa* race. When he had lorded over the whole flock of the gods themselves, and kept them all under his thumb, he cares a fig for Rāma, an ordinary human being. Consequently, he takes practically no notice of the reports of the mighty heroic feats of Rāma and dismisses them all in his mind as trifles. Such attitude of cold apathy and complacency continues from the moment he receives the first shattering news of the overthrow of Khara and the massacre of his huge army (which otherwise shakes the whole *rākṣasa*-world) and runs through the long chain of dreadful killings by Rāma, Lakṣmaṇa and their monkey-allies, until the defeat of Prahasta, his supreme commander-in-chief. Only a little while ago, while commissioning Prahasta to lead the army to success, he had openly declared before all that Prahasta, was one of the “big five” of the *rākṣasa* side, equating him with himself, Kumbhakarna, Indrajit and Nikumbha (son of Kumbhakarna)²⁰. For the first time, he takes notice of the strength of the enemy, advises circumspection and instructs his men not to take the enemy lightly (*nāvajñā ripave kāryā*)²¹ and decides to lead the army himself. Here we have a tacit admission of the strength of his enemy by Rāvaṇa. It is noteworthy that even here he avoids mentioning Rāma directly by name but puts it in general terms as “enemy”. All the same, the reference to the enemy in the singular here by Vālmīki clearly shows that Rāvaṇa had only Rāma, his arch-enemy in mind, though he still fights shy of spelling out his name, while conceding his greatness. (Mark the subtlety of Vālmīki’s suggestive art!).

He gets the second major shock when he is humbled by Rāma, stands helpless before him, humiliated and crest-fallen and his life is spared by Rāma’s mercy. He certainly realises Rāma’s greatness in his heart of hearts. Here Vālmīki describes Rāvaṇa’s inward feelings and says that the bitter memory of the fierce lightning-like arrows of

20. *ahaṁ vā kumbhakarṇo vā tvaṁ va senāpatir-mama /
indrajit-vā nikumbho vā vaheyur-bhāram-īdr̥ṣam //*
(YK 57,6-7)

21. YK 59,4.

Rāma was haunting Rāvaṇa and torturing his mind²². But the supreme artist that he is, Vālmīki does not make his Rāvaṇa speak a word about Rāma at this moment of mortification. Instead, his expression of the vanity of his penance and discomfiture at being defeated by a mere man, his wistful reminiscence of his earlier misadventures which had brought all manner of curses upon himself, climaxed by the affirmation that the words of sages never go false (*na mithyā ṛṣibhāṣitam*)²³ – which sounds rather strange in Rāvaṇa's mouth! – and the deep concern with which he exhorts the *rākṣasas* to leave no stone unturned in guarding the city and to pull Kumbhakarna (cursed by Brahmā to endless sleep for months) out of his sleep as the only saviour left – all these speak volumes for Rāvaṇa's mute acceptance of Rāma's greatness after the crushing blow he received in the open combat. It is significant to note that Kamban, the author of the Tamil *Rāmāyaṇa* took the cue from Vālmīki and played up this episode to boost up the picture of Rāvaṇa's humiliation and Rāma's nobility.

There is another still more subtle and still more interesting evidence of Rāvaṇa's apprehensive conclusion of Rāma's greatness. When Rāma had spared his life and had given him a new lease of life and a second chance to fight with him the next day with fuller preparedness and vigour, the established military code of conduct governing battles in the India of those days required that he should have promptly accepted the challenge and presented himself the next day for an honourable combat. The more proper and more honourable course for Rāvaṇa, quite becoming a hero of his stature, would have been to spurn the offer of life doled out by the enemy and to have fought to the last then and there and perished in the battle, if need be; rather than to save himself at the cost of honour. But Vālmīki's Rāvaṇa does neither of these. Apparently, he did not have the confidence to pick up the gauntlet thrown by Rāma. He takes advantage of Rāma's truly magnanimous gesture and retires from battle and what is

22. *brahma-daṇḍa-prakāśanām vidyut-saḍṛṣa-varcasām / smaran-rāghava-bāṇanām vidhyate rākṣaseśvaraḥ* // (YK 60,3)

23. YK 60,12.

still worse, avoids going to the battlefield the next day and for many following days until all others fall and he has no escape left.

The next day, he summons the *rākṣasas* and quietly issues peremptory orders to rouse Kumbhakarṇa from his accursed sleep and, that done, he appeals to him to save the *rākṣasas* from the menacing attack by the enemy. But what about his own fighting with Rāma? The poet is silent – enigmatically silent. The poet's silence exposes his timidity more powerfully than words.

By making his Rāvaṇa silently pass over Rāma's truly heroic challenge, Vālmīki beautifully suggests that Rāvaṇa feared that he had caught a Tartar in Rāma, that he was diffident of the outcome of a second combat and was, therefore, looking for a safer alternative for defeating Rāma and cleverly made a cat's paw of Kumbhakarṇa. By thus making his Rāvaṇa fight shy of facing Rāma again and making him adopt the easier expedient of diplomatic withdrawal, instead of facing Rāma squarely in battle, Vālmīki had beautifully suggested that Rāvaṇa was inwardly convinced of Rāma's superiority as a warrior, though he would rather not speak about it at the moment of personal humiliation at Rāma's hands.

The next phase in the gradual change of Rāvaṇa's mental attitude towards Rāma from total indifference to concern, apprehension and fear is described by Vālmīki in the sequel to Kumbhakarṇa's fateful defeat and death. Kumbhakarṇa, with his gigantic figure, was a Colossus among Colossuses on the *rākṣasa* side and, verily, the most formidable of the *rākṣasa* clan. Hence he was the ultimate hope of Rāvaṇa for saving Laṅkā by inflicting a crushing defeat on the enemy. The saga of Kumbhakarṇa's encounter, first with the *vānara* army and its chiefs and later with Rāma, as pictured by Vālmīki²⁴, is a fine blend of his strength and weakness. The miserable havoc that he wrought with the huge army of monkeys in the beginning and the equally miserable death at the end bear witness to both. The slaying of Kumbhakarṇa is one of the most ghastly scenes of the battle of

24. For the havoc Kumbhakarṇa wrought on the monkey-army, vide YK 66,12-18; 67,5-8; 67,35-36 and 67,97-100. And for the miserable death of Kumbhakarṇa vide YK 67,167-185.

Laṅkā in the *Rāmāyaṇa*. His ears and nose are chopped off first; but it means practically nothing to him. He moves about undaunted as before in the battlefield leaving thousands of corpses of monkeys in his trail. His two arms are then severed simultaneously; but still he moves on crushing thousands under his feet. Rāma then severs his two legs, arresting his movements. This is then followed by the final decapitation, the monstrous head crashing on the buildings and the walls around. The truncated trunk now falls down with a mighty thud like a blown up mountain, with one part on the ground of the battlefield and the other part on the waters of the sea, crushing myriads of monkeys to death on the ground and frightening the fleeing fishes, sharks, whales and what not, under the sea. Kumbhakarna's fall is thus a tale of horror with no parallel in Vālmīki.

Such gruesome death of a much-loved brother, a tower of strength to him, at the hands of Rāma does unnerve and shake Rāvaṇa for the nonce. Still, thanks to his stubborn self-conceit, he does not care to ponder over the root-cause of such an incredible fall of the nonpareil of *rākṣasa*-strength. However, a sub-conscious undercurrent of fear starts coursing through his veins, which gets veiled exposure in his touching lament. Vālmīki's art harnesses this long lament to reveal his mournful realisation of Rāma's greatness. The wail of Rāvaṇa is not only a confession of Rāma's superior valour by Rāvaṇa but also an indirect tribute to his greatness from Rāvaṇa himself. He mourns that with Kumbhakarna's loss, all is lost and if he does not slay the slayer of Kumbhakarna in battle, he would prefer to die, rather than lead a wretched life. He declares in plain words: «I have no use for the kingdom now. And what will I do with Sītā? I have no zest for life, when you are gone. How can I defeat Indra now, when you are dead? The gods will now mock at me for my previous misdeeds towards them...»²⁵.

He becomes despondent. Apparently for the first time in his life,

25. *rājyena nāsti me kāryaṁ kiṁ kariṣyāmi sītayā /
kumbhakarna-vihīnasya jīvite nāsti me ratiḥ //.....
devā hi mām hasiṣyanti dṛṣṭvā pūrvāpakāriṇam /
kattham-indram jayiṣyāmi kumbhakarna hate tvayi //*
(YK 68, 17-21)

pessimistic words indicative of deep-rooted despair and frustration escape his lips. In a fit of self-condemnation and self-pity he says that he was paying for his own earlier folly of not heeding the sound advice of his brother Vibhīṣaṇa, whom he now hails as “*dhārmika*” and “*mahātman*”²⁶. Likewise, he regrets his not heeding Kumbhakarna and Prahasta. With his unfailing artistic sensibilities, Vālmiki makes the self-opinionated “Rāvaṇa, the great” stoop for the first time to declare that *he* was feeling doubly ashamed that he was responsible for the most distressing and pitiable end inflicted on the mighty Kumbhakarna by being literally cut to pieces as much as for the horrid carnage of the *rākṣasas*:

tadidaṁ mām-anupraptam vibhīṣaṇa-vacaḥ śubham //
yad ajñānan-mayā tasya na grhītam mahātmanaḥ /
vibhīṣaṇa-vaco yāvat kumbhakarna-prahastayoḥ //
vināśo 'yaṁ samutpanno mām vrīḍayati dāruṇaḥ /
tasyāyaṁ karmaṇaḥ prāpto vipāko mama śokadaḥ //
*yan-mayā dhārmikaḥ śrīman sa nirasto vibhīṣaṇaḥ //*²⁷

Such words of self-pity escaping the lips of Rāvaṇa, for the first time in his life of imperious imperialism, provide the best possible commentary of Rāvaṇa's admission of Rāma's might. This picture of total transformation of Rāvaṇa (albeit temporary), is a fine instance of Vālmiki's poetry of power, with its immense suggestive force and is perhaps a more powerful expression than words of Rāvaṇa's vocal confession of Rāma's greatness and nobility as warrior.

I have confined myself here to Vālmiki's projection of Rāma from his enemies' eyes. But the Rāma-theme has been handled by hundreds of Sanskrit poets through their poetic and dramatic creations. A similar study of the projections of Rāma made by these creative artists is bound to be equally rewarding. But that will be beyond the scope of this paper and has to be reserved for a separate study. However, I shall refer here to one random verse, just by way of illustration, to indicate the interesting possibilities of such an exercise.

26. YK 68,24 and 68,22 (*vide* f.n. 26 below).

27. YK 68,21-24.

This beautiful floating verse, put in the mouth of Rāvaṇa, preserved in north Indian tradition, makes Rāvaṇa himself affirm Rāma's loftiness as a paragon of virtue. (Cf. Vālmiki's "*rāmo vigrahavān dharmah*"²⁸ put in the mouth of Mārīca).

This anonymous verse with its unique poetical conceit is in the form of a dialogue between Rāvaṇa and his *rākṣasa*-lieutenants on his first landing in Laṅkā, bringing with him the abducted Sītā. The verse runs thus:

*ahnāya pratibuddhyatām – kim-abhavad – rāmāṅganā hyāhṛtā
bhuktā kinna – yato hi naiva bhajate rāmāt param jānakī /
rāmah kinna bhavān abhūt – śṛṇu sakhe tātī-dala-śyāmalam
rāmāṅgam bhajato mamāpi kaluṣībhāvo na sañjāyate //*

Here is a free translation of the verse. Rāvaṇa opens the dialogue:

- Rāvaṇa : «Hark! Wake up, friends, wake up immediately.»
 Rākṣasa : «What is the matter, sir?»
 Rāvaṇa : «I have brought Rāma's wife.»
 Rākṣasa : «Why didn't you enjoy her, then and there?»
 Rāvaṇa : «What to do? Sītā will not let any one else touch her, except Rāma.»
 Rākṣasa : «Why didn't you become Rāma, yourself?»
 Rāvaṇa : «Listen, my dear friend, I did that. But lo! The moment I assume that bewitching blue figure of Rāma, all evil thoughts and intentions are obliterated even from my mind!»

The poetic implication speaks for itself. Further comment is needless.

Akampana

I have made the foregoing study of the perceptions of two major *rākṣasa*-enemies and one feminine representative from the enemies'

28. ARK 37,13 (*vide* verse quoted against f.n. 12).

side to understand the profound impact of Rāma's personality on his enemies. However, the study could not be as extensive or exhaustive as I would have wished. A similar detailed study of all characters, male and female, whose perceptions of Rāma have a bearing on this new perspective would make the paper unconscionably long. Hence I shall now briefly touch upon some minor characters from the enemies' camp whose personal experiences of Rāma's conduct or actions compel them to speak out what they thought of Rāma.

I may also mention here, *inter alia*, that some of these characters like Vālin, Kumbhakarna and Tārā also belong to that limited group of Rāma's enemies, who according to the exponents of *Vālmiki-Rāmāyaṇa* tradition in South India realised, partially or otherwise, the truth of Rāma's divinity.

Among the minor *rākṣasas* who openly declared Rāma's unquestioned superiority as a warrior is the not-so-well-known Akampana. This Akampana was Rāvaṇa's confidant in Janasthāna, placed by him along with Khara and his associates Dūṣaṇa and Triśiras, to guard the interests of the *rākṣasas* in Daṇḍakā forest. He was the lone survivor²⁹ of the mighty massacre (along with Śūrpaṇakhā, of course) of the fourteen thousand strong army of Khara and also the first person to report the news of the terrible battle and its tragic outcome to Rāvaṇa.

Rāvaṇa is taken aback by the detailed report and immediately decides to proceed to Janasthāna to punish Rāma for his audacity in attacking the guardians of his fortress in Janasthāna. Thereupon

29. For evidence that Akampana was the lone survivor, see the following:

(1) *caturdaśa-sahasrāṇi rākṣasāṃ bhūma-karmaṇām ||*
hatāny-ekena rāmeṇa manuṣeṇa padātinā |
tasya sainyasya sarvasya kharaḥ śeṣo mahārathaḥ ||
rākṣasas-tripurāś-caiva rāmaś-ca ripu-sūdanah |
śeṣā hatā mahā-sattvā rākṣasā raṇamūrdhani ||
 (ARK 26,35-37)

(2) Akampana's own words:

janasthāna-stithā rājan rākṣasā bahavo hatāḥ |
kharaś-ca nihatāḥ saṅkhye katthanācid-aham-āgataḥ ||
 (ARK 31,2)

(3) Śūrpaṇakhā's words in her description of the battle to Rāvaṇa:
ekā katham-cidn-mukāham paribhūja mahātmanā |
 (ARK 34,11)

Akampana warns Rāvaṇa of the futility of his adventure and makes bold to tell him in so many words that he was no match for Rāma. Without mincing words, he summarises Rāma's superiority in high pitched language and affirms to Rāvaṇa clearly that what he said was the bare truth and represented the hard reality of Rāma's prowess. He says: «When Rāma is enraged, no one can face him. He can arrest the gushing waters of a river in spate with his arrows. He can destroy the whole heavens with the planets and stars. He can pull up the worlds submerged in the waters of the oceans. He can break the earthy barriers of the oceans and deluge the whole world. With his arrows he can annihilate the worlds and recreate them at will».

*asādhyah kupito rāmo vikrameṇa mahāyaśāḥ /
āpagāyāḥ supūrṇāyaḥ vegāḥ parihareccharaiḥ //
satāra-graha-nakṣatraṁ nabhaścāpy-avasādayet /
asau rāmastu majjantīm śrīmān abhyuddharen-mahīm //
bhittvā velām samudrasya lokān-āplāvayed vibhuḥ /
vegāḥ vāpi samudrasya vāyurṇ vā vidhameccharaiḥ //
samhṛtya vā punar-lokān vikrameṇa mahāyaśāḥ /
śaktaḥ sa puruṣa-vyāghraḥ sraṣṭuṁ punarapi prajāḥ //*³⁰

Akampana concludes this high flown description of Rāma's powers with a fitting peroration, affirming Rāma's decided superiority to Rāvaṇa. Having first got the assurance of his own personal safety for speaking unpalatable truths, he does not hesitate to call a spade a spade and tells Rāvaṇa on his face that he or the *rākṣasas* put together can never dream of defeating Rāma in battle. Victory would be as impossible for him to get as a place in heaven for condemned sinners.

*na hi rāmo daśagrīva śakyo jetuṁ tvayā yudhi /
rākṣasāṁ vāpi lokena svargaḥ pāpa-janair-iva //*³¹

This candid declaration of Rāma's greatness as a warrior by a *rākṣasa* from the enemy camp and that too before the impetuous Rāvaṇa himself is another fine instance of what his enemies thought

30. ARK 31,23-26.

31. ARK 31,27.

of him and affirms the truth that he had an edge over Rāvaṇa, which eventually led to Rāvaṇa's defeat in the epoch-making battle, which is best summarised by Vālmīki's enthralling verse³², which a traditional story hails as the first and the only illustration in the whole epic for the figure of speech *Ananyā* of Sanskrit poetics.

This speech of Akampana before Rāvaṇa highlights also the enemy's perception of another aspect of Rāma's personality, his ardent love for Sītā. Advising about the only possible means of putting an end to Rāma, Akampana says: «His wife Sītā is a nonpareil of beauty, unmatched by any from the world of gods, Gandharvas, Apsarases or Asuras. She is the apple of Rāma's eyes. You carry her away by force. Unable to bear her separation, the passionate lover, Rāma, will give up his life on his own»³³. Though Akampana's perception of Rāma is coloured by his *rākṣasa* thinking and does not represent the whole truth, it gives the enemy's projection of Rāma's unbounded and self-effacing love for Sītā, an aspect not touched by any other person from the enemy's ranks.

Kumbhakarṇa

Reference has already been made to the horrifying manner of Kumbhakarṇa's death. Passing mention was also made of the traditional theory that Kumbhakarṇa was one of the handful of characters conceived by Vālmīki as conscious of the divinity of Rāma. We shall now examine what this most formidable physical giant of the *rākṣasa* world – a whit greater than Rāvaṇa himself – thought of Rāma.

There are three occasions in the *Yuddhakāṇḍa* which highlight Kumbhakarṇa's vision of Rāma. It looks somewhat strange that Kumbhakarṇa's perception of Rāma as reflected in these different passages appears to be mutually contradictory. He appears to speak in

32. *gaganaiḥ gaganākāraiḥ sāgaras-sāgaropamaḥ /
rāma-rāvaṇayor-yuddhaiḥ rāma-rāvaṇayor-iva //*
(YK 110,23)

33. ARK 31,29-31.

different voices with different persons and in different circumstances. When he speaks to Rāvaṇa, he swears in the strongest possible terms that Rāma is no match for him and he will finish him with utmost ease. With Vibhiṣaṇa in the battlefield he affirms with equal force that Rāma was greater than he (Kumbhakarṇa), by head and shoulders and that he was sure to meet with his end in the encounter with Rāma and that the destruction of Laṅkā and the whole *rākṣasa* race was a foregone conclusion.

We shall now have a brief look at the three occasions as described by Vālmiki. The first occasion is when news is received that the enemy with his vast army of monkeys is standing ready, poised for the attack. Rāvaṇa calls a meeting of his council of ministers and other *rākṣasa*-chiefs and seeks their advice but lays down two preconditions: first, Sītā will not be returned, and second, Rāma and Lakṣmaṇa have to be slain (*adeyā ca yathā sītā vadhyau daśarathāt-majau* / ³⁴).

When his turn comes, Kumbhakarṇa first chides Rāvaṇa for doing everything topsy-turvy. Seeking advice after the deed was done was a futile exercise, he says. Rāvaṇa was putting the cart before the horse by first indulging in vice and then attempting to square up with its disastrous consequences. After this initial admonition, Kumbhakarṇa changes mood and tells Rāvaṇa that he need have no worry. He would spare no pains to do his bidding and finish off the two brothers and make it even. His gigantic body with the lethal spear in hand was enough to strike terror even in Indra's soul. He assures Rāvaṇa that he would dispatch Rāma and Lakṣmaṇa to the abode of Death. As for the monkeys, they were small fry; he would devour them all in their millions. Finally, he exhorts Rāvaṇa to be completely carefree, to drink, dance and make merry.

The second occasion, when Kumbhakarṇa speaks out his opinions about Rāma is when the crest-fallen Rāvaṇa thinks of him as his sole refuge, gets him pulled out of his sleep and appeals to him to rescue the *rākṣasas* from imminent danger. Kumbhakarṇa is again his own self and responds more or less on the same lines as on the first

34. YK 12,25.

occasion. His long reply begins with a sort of patronising chide for Rāvaṇa's previous misdemeanour but ends in a tone of full assurance and relief to Rāvaṇa.

The reply breathes the same spirit of total confidence in defeating Rāma and puts courage and hope back in Rāvaṇa's soul. Vālmiki's intentions in both these cases are quite obvious. He conceived of both these replies of Kumbhakarṇa as antidotes for Rāvaṇa's deep frustrations and designed to boost his drooping spirits. Obviously, he had to belittle Rāma's powers and pooh-pooh his chances of victory. Vālmiki too indicates such an attitude on the part of Kumbhakarṇa. When Rāvaṇa reacts sharply to Kumbhakarṇa when the latter points out that the crisis that Rāvaṇa was facing was just the nemesis of his previous misdeeds, the poet observes: «Realising that Rāvaṇa was much upset and angry, Kumbhakarṇa spoke soft words to console him and assuage his hurt soul».

*ruṣṭo-'yam-iti vijñāya śanaiḥ ślakṣṇam-uvāca ha /
atīva hi samālakṣya bhrātaram kṣubhitendriyam //
kumbhakarṇaḥ śanair-vākyam babhāṣe parisāntvayan /*³⁵

On account of this artificial cover, these responses of Kumbhakarṇa do not reflect his real mind. For understanding the truth of Kumbhakarṇa, we have to look to the third occasion, when he speaks out his mind to Vibhīṣaṇa in the battlefield. This touching speech reveals his genuine thoughts and his innermost feelings about Rāma. When Vibhīṣaṇa advances, mace in hand, to join Rāma in his attack against Kumbhakarṇa, he assumes the role of an affectionate and tender-hearted elder brother and utters words which throw abundant light not only on his deep conviction about Rāma's unquestioned supremacy as a warrior and the certainty of Rāvaṇa's rout and Rāma's victory but also on his unbounded love for Vibhīṣaṇa and appreciation of his moral courage in leaving the ranks of *adharma* and joining the fold of *dharma* by casting his lot with Rāma. He does not hesitate to lay bare his soul before Vibhīṣaṇa at this critical moment. He says:

35. YK 63,29-30.

«You have done what all of us ought to have done. You have the distinction of being the lone *rākṣasa*, protected by the armour of *dharma* and Truth. People who stick to *dharma* will never have to face misery. You are going to be the lone survivor of the battle to perpetuate the *rākṣasa* lineage. Through Rāma's grace, you are destined to become the king of the *rākṣasa* world»³⁶. The tone of this soulful speech of Kumbhakarna to Vibhīṣaṇa makes it abundantly clear that his real thoughts and warm sentiments for Rāma are enshrined in this last speech, which becomes a sort of swan-song, since Kumbhakarna is cocksure of his impending death at Rāma's hands. This also shows that whatever he said of Rāma to Rāvaṇa earlier to the contrary was motivated by a mere desire to encourage him and soothe his spirits.

With even greater candour and tenderness of soul, he finally tells Vibhīṣaṇa: «For goodness sake, please do not cross my way, but stand aside at once. In the mad rush, I cannot see who are mine and who are others. You have to be saved at any cost, my beloved brother. Believe me. What I tell you is the real truth».

*Prakṛtyā mama durdharṣa śighraṁ mārgād apakrama /
na sthātavyaṁ purastān me sambhramān-naṣṭa-cetasah //
na vedmi samyuge śaktaḥ svān parān va niśācara /
rakṣaṇīyo'si me vatsa satyam-etad bravīmi te //*³⁷

This proves, if proof be needed at all, that Kumbhakarna secretly admired and adored Rāma as an upholder of *dharma* and as a great warrior, protected by the invincible armour of *dharma*.

Before concluding, I shall make a brief mention of a few more persons from the enemy's ranks without going into full details to indicate the broad cross-section of the widely different classes of people from the enemy's fold who recognised and believed in Rāma's true heroism and loftiness of spirit.

36. *asmat-kāryaṁ kṛtaṁ vatsa yas-tvaṁ rāmam-upāgataḥ //
tvam-eko rakṣasāṁ loke satya-dharmābhirakṣitaḥ /
nāsti dharmābhiraktānāṁ vyasanāṁ tu kadācana //*
*santānārthaṁ tvamevāikaḥ kulasyāśya bhaviṣyasi /
rāghavasya prasādāt-tvaṁ rakṣasāṁ rājyam-āpsyasi //*
(YK 67,148-150)

37. YK 67, 151-152.

Mālyavān

Rāvaṇa's maternal grand-father Mālyavān, serves as a representative of the senior group of sober *rākṣasas* who realised Rāma's rectitude and greatness in valour. His sound advice to Rāvaṇa before the outbreak of the war takes up a whole canto in Vālmīki³⁸. The gist of the advice is as follows. Mālyavān makes a fervent plea to Rāvaṇa to go in for a treaty of peace with Rāma and return Sītā to him. It was an established principle of polity that the weaker party should seek the alliance. Rāvaṇa had weakened himself by his previous misdeeds and misbehaviour towards great sages. Rāma, on the other hand, had aligned with the gods and upheld *dharma*. That was the source of his great strength. His final victory was, therefore, assured. Mālyavān further adds that he could visualise before his eyes the macabre scene of the impending destruction of *rākṣasas* and so on. The tenor of the whole advice to Rāvaṇa – which was destined to go on deaf ears – shows that he considered Rāma as the exemplar of *dharma* and also realised that Rāma's outstanding stature as an invincible hero was the corollary of his faithful adherence to *dharma*.

The rākṣasa-women of Laṅkā

A whole canto³⁹ is devoted by Vālmīki to paint the heart-rending picture of hundreds of thousands of common *rākṣasa* women drawn from the proletariat class wailing over their dear ones – sons, brothers, husbands etc. This canto comes immediately after the tremendous massacre of the *rākṣasa* army by Rāma with the aid of the dangerously lethal *Gāndharva-astra*. At the close of the whole exercise, Rāma himself declares its deadly power with the words that only two could wield this divine *astra* – either he or Śiva, the destroyer of the universe.

In Vālmīki's description, the women, first of all, curse Śūrpaṇakhā for her sex-mania and cry hoarse that the carnal craving

38. YK canto 35.

39. YK canto 95.

of that old wretch – wrinkled and grey-haired, sexy and voluptuous, repulsive and monstrous – for the handsome young Rāma, beautiful like Manmatha, the god of love, was the root cause of all the miseries of millions of their lot. This typically feminine projection of the lament by the master poet, Vālmiki, is particularly interesting and highlights an aspect of Rāma's personality, not touched by any others from the enemy's ranks.

This is followed by an equally powerful and touching account of Rāma's numerous heroic exploits, each of which was sufficient testimony of his superhuman stature. Quite in tune with the mournful mood of women belonging to the rank and file of *rākṣasas*, Vālmiki employs "*paryāptam tan-nidarśanam*"⁴⁰ as the burden of their pitiable outburst of grief and concludes them with the woeful statement that it was Rudra, Viṣṇu, Indra or Yama, the god of Death himself, who had struck at them in the guise of Rāma. This shows how awe-struck the whole lot of women were about Rāma's invincible striking power as a heroic fighter and gives an idea of their image of Rāma.

Mantharā, Kaikeyī, Vālin and Tārā

Reference was made in the beginning to Mantharā and Kaikeyī among humans ill-disposed to Rāma but the two present a peculiar contrast. While Mantharā's ill-will towards Rāma is deep-rooted and endures to the last, the inimical posture of the guileless Kaikeyī is a temporary super-imposition on her pure and natural love for Rāma. Her animosity for Rāma is but a temporary phase, which lasts for the limited period between the time the illusion of false fears about Bharata's future is created by Mantharā and the subsequent disillusionment that dawns on her later. While Kaikeyī's apparently obstinate animosity for Rāma – the darling of the whole of Ayodhyā is thus explicable, the uncompromising ill-will of Mantharā for Rāma, which is portrayed by Vālmiki as an inborn trait of her character, is really intriguing and defies explanation. The moot question is, if Rāma was so beloved of all, what could be the reason for Mantharā's hostile

40. YK canto 95. This is repeated in verses 13 and 15-20.

disposition towards Rāma? Many explanations have been offered by students of *Rāmāyaṇa*, engaged in unravelling the mind of Vālmīki. Constraints of space will not permit discussion of these here-long before. Bhoja, the author of *Rāmāyaṇa-Campū*, attempted a poetic explanation – with a humorous overtone – by saying that Vālmīki made her physical frame crooked by conceiving her as a hunch-back, suggesting thereby that her deformed exterior was just a reflection of the internal crookedness of her soul! In an oft-quoted verse with a matchless simile, comparing Mantharā to a she-buffalo, muddying the clear and placid waters of a lotus pond, he wrote of Mantharā that her naturally crooked heart became a bosom-friend of her body!

yasyāś-cittaṁ prakṛti-kuṭilam gātra-mitraṁ babhūva /

But the question is not fully answered. It needs a full critical assessment of the numerous statements made by Vālmīki and the telling imagery employed by him in relation to Mantharā to understand the poet's mind on the vexed issue of Mantharā's and Kaikeyī's enmity for Rāma. This has again to be reserved for a separate study.

Likewise, the disposition of Vālin and Tārā, among monkeys, towards Rāma – which has been hotly debated for centuries by commentators and critics examining justice or injustice of Rāma's killing Vālin – also call for a very detailed study which, for reasons of space-constraints, cannot be squeezed in this paper.

Aṅgada and Jābālin

As for Aṅgada and Jābālin, the situation is still more complex. In my opinion, there is extensive scope for questions of add manner and kind, which naturally arise about their relationship with Rāma and about Vālmīki's deeper intentions. For the same reason mentioned above, it is not possible to take these up here.

These minor omissions and limitations notwithstanding, I hope, I have said enough to present a tolerably complete picture of Vālmīki's Rāma, as seen by his many enemies, at least the more important of them.